

A woman in climbing gear, including a blue helmet, sunglasses, a red jacket, and a backpack, is kneeling on a snowy mountain slope. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a steep, rocky mountain face covered in snow.

Mt. Dade

**Kathy Post-Holing
on Summit**

TRIP REPORT
June 14, 2009

by Augie Medina

Mt. Dade Through the Hourglass

Our Camp at Treasure Lakes



Weather Thwarts Abbot

Mid-June in the Eastern Sierra Nevada. Things didn't look hopeful for tomorrow. Light snow showers had persisted all day and for all we knew, would get heavier during the night. Our party of eight (a Sierra Peaks Section outing led by Kathy Rich and Alexander Smirnoff) was camped in the Treasure Lakes area where good tent sites are hard to come by.

Earlier in the day, we had set out in the early afternoon toward Mt. Abbot. But the snowfall slowed our big group down considerably. We got to about

12,000 feet, where we had a mini-lunch break as the sky continued leaking white flakes and the clouds blanketed any view. On the descent back to camp there was lots of post-holing, often to thigh level. We all had our turn practicing that familiar embarrassed look as you awkwardly try to liberate yourself from the grip of the hole you've sunk into. No way to make that self-extraction look graceful.

We had been on the go all day, packing in from the Mosquito Flats trailhead, setting up camp in the snow, preparing summit packs, and then making a go at Abbot. The white stuff was still coming down steadily upon return to camp. I was spent. It was cold. I retreated to my tent, fired up my Jetboil in



**Heading up snow slope
towards Mt Abbot**

the vestibule and prepared a bowl of spicy mashed potatoes with cheese topping. Even the food didn't rejuvenate me. I mustered enough effort to prepare my pack for tomorrow and to find a place for my bear canister upslope from the tent.

The wind gusted and the snowfall continued. I didn't relish the thought of having to get up in the middle of the night to toss snow off the top of the tent. I put my camera and a full water bottle inside my sleeping bag and called it a day. Luckily, it stopped snowing during the night.

A Come Hither Day

I slept fairly well and 5 a.m. came fast. So hard to get out of the bag and don boots and gaiters. Harder still to get cold, stiff body through the tent opening and out to meet the frigid morning. Turns out that half our party was not ready for this ritual (actually, one person had gone back to the trailhead the previous evening because he had come for Abbot and we hadn't gotten her). So only four of us departed Camp Frigid toward the Hourglass Couloir. The mountain gods had arranged for the weather to clear and we would even get some sun.

We moved fairly fast and got to the bottom of the couloir in less than an hour. There certainly would be no need for crampons today. The snow was fresh, soft and in too many places, post-hole deep. Those conditions make obviously for greater effort in breaking trail than with hard pack. The four of us took turns leading and we worked diligently for each of those 1,000 feet of ascent.

At last we reached the cirque at the top of the couloir. Altimeters read 12, 800' or thereabouts. We hung a big right and started up the ridge leading to the summit. This

was mixed terrain; lots of slippery, wet rock and deep wells next to large boulders to entrap a careless leg. We encountered a sole 20 foot section where we got some very hard snow below the surface fluff and made us consider strapping on crampons. But the leader at that point managed to kick adequate steps for everyone to follow comfortably without additional aid.

The ridge gets you to a point where it appears the summit is right in front of you, but in fact isn't. We went left around this "false" summit and continued up until we reached the high point on the ridge. The views from the summit were your standard magnificent Eastern Sierra panorama. The main attraction was the eye-candy that is Bear Creek Spire. She always looks "hot," beautiful shape and all.

After a few minutes on top, including leafing through and signing the register, we hurried back down the ridge in anticipation of an exhilarating glissade down the couloir. Everyone got their slippery pants on and away we went. It was as much fun as we expected. An hour and a half to get up the couloir and just a few minutes to get back down. Where is the balance in mountaineering?

Alas, Back to the Blackberry and Twitter

We were back to camp just after noon time and regaled the three that had stayed back with tales of daring and adventure. Then the mundane world reappeared and we had to undertake the tedious task of breaking camp. My pack felt heavier on the way out than coming in and the 4 or 5 miles back to the trailhead seemed endless. But within an hour of reaching the cars, we had all converged on a pizza joint in Bishop to gorge on fat calories and watch part of the Laker game. Life is good.



Kathy preparing for 1,000' glissade

A couple of days away from Blackberry vigilance and Twitter restoreth the soul.



Hourglass Couloir seen from near camp

View from Mt. Dade's summit



TRIP REPORT

The Sierra Challenge; Matthew Holliman

First to Dayhike the SPS Peaks List

by **Ron Hudson
& Bob Burd**



*Matthew just below the summit
block on Clarence King*

**Matthew Holliman ponders the summit
block of Mt. Jordan, July 2007**

photo by Bob Burd

Origin of the Sierra Challenge and a First: Dayhiking the SPS List!

Introduction by Ron Hudson

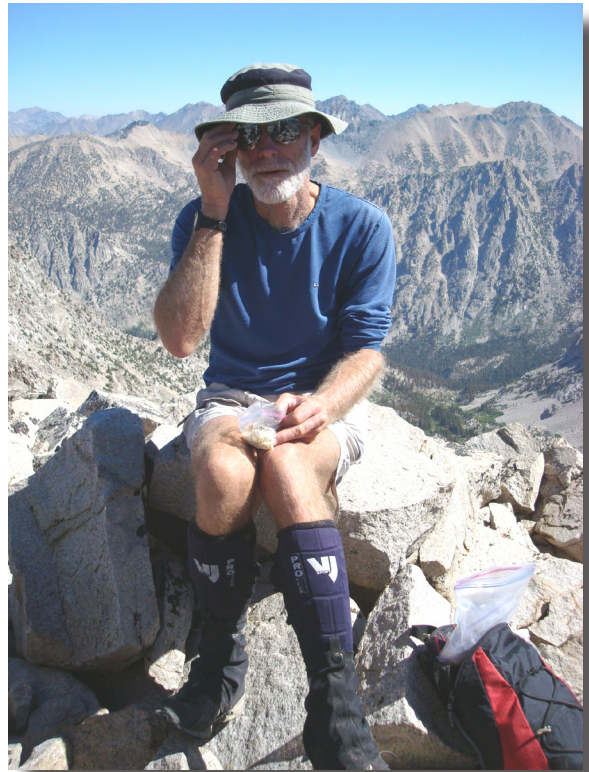
For nine years now, Bob Burd has organized the Sierra Challenge, which is ten days in a row of dayhikes of challenging peaks in the Sierra Nevada. I have participated in a few of them; but by no means every peak of the event, as only a few of the fittest and most motivated are able to do this.

The challenge for me is to do some of the peaks at least, and to attempt to keep up with the lead group. It is a motivation to keep in top shape beforehand and to hike enough to improve one's fitness. It is fun to get together with the others, however tired we may be afterward, and chat about our adventures. Bob also includes in the Challenge a few peaks that most SPSers have not heard of, such as Wahoo and Two Eagle Peaks.

This year's Challenge hikes ranged from 16 miles, 4,900' of gain to a daunting climb of Marion Peak--30 miles and 11,600' gain (but Bob, superbly fit, was successful in 16 hours). Bob organizes the event to a T, putting in many hours on maps, descriptions, and selection of the included peaks. I have seen him back at the motel in the evening after his hike with a finished report for that day and photos that he and others took, all downloaded to his website.

Bob also records everybody's success and time on a spreadsheet for all to view (see the website at: <http://www.snwburd.com/bob/challenge/2009/index.html>). There are 'awards' too, such as the Yellow, Polkadot, Green and White Jerseys. A Wall Street Journal article was written on Bob Burd and the 2005 Challenge: <http://www.snwburd.com/bob/challenge/2005/wsj.htm>. Other Challenge discussions appear in a thread on SummitPost.org: <http://www.summitpost.org/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=45012>.

Bob told me he has climbed more than 1200 peaks,



Ron Hudson, first atop West Vidette during the 2007 Sierra Challenge

not just in the Sierra. It is his belief that with enough effort, any peak in California could be dayhiked. Bob's "Sierra Travels" website has detailed trip reports for all his climbs: <http://www.snwburd.com/bob/>. He also has an active Yahoo! group, the "Sierra Scrambles" that anyone can participate in: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sierrasrambles/>.

Bob is close to finishing the SPS list (8 remaining as of this writing), all as dayhikes. His hiking partner, Matthew Holliman, finished dayhiking the SPS List on August 7, 2009, on The Hermit. A first and an amazing achievement. Hats off to Matthew! Bob has graciously written the following article for the Echo since a few of us, including myself, Kathy Rich and Dan Richter, felt that it would be of great interest to the membership. It is about Matthew, Bob's quest and the history of the Sierra Challenge.

The Sierra Challenge; Matthew Holliman First to Dayhike the SPS Peaks List

by Bob Burd

Sometime around 1994 at the ripe age of 34, I discovered RJ Secor's bible on Sierra peakbagging, and like many enthusiasts before me I became interested, eager, and eventually obsessed with the seemingly limitless opportunities presented by the Range of Light. The discovery of the SPS list further strengthened my resolve and I methodically went about seeking out peaks from the list, at first looking for class 1-2, then class 3, eventually taking rock climbing classes with Yosemite Mountaineering School to allow me to reach some of the more technical summits. With friends in the summer of 2000 I visited Mt. Clark, the Palisades, and Mt. Clarence King carrying backpacks loaded with overnight and climbing gear. I found the climbing and the summits superb, but the hikes in and out with 60lb packs a painful chore. There had to be another way.

In Dec of 2000 I did a 30mi, 8,000-foot gain dayhike to Ventana Double Cone in the Santa Lucia Range, a hike I was told beforehand couldn't be done in a day. It was after this that I turned my attention to long dayhikes in the Sierra and conceived the idea of the Sierra Challenge. I'd read of long efforts to climb the CA and CO fourteeners by the likes of Hans Florine and Ted Keizer, but having sleep deprivation as part of the equation just didn't appeal to me. I picked the easiest SPS Emblem peaks to be climbed one each day, for ten consecutive days. I got a dozen folks to join me that first year, though most of those were interested in the second to last day's visit to Mt. Whitney. For the most part there were just two of us on the other days, and for most of those I was the only one to summit. I managed to summit 9 of the 10 peaks and declared it a success despite the low turnout.

In subsequent years the list of participants grew. The list of "Challenge Peaks" as they became called, changed each year, generally taken from the SPS list, but others as well, always peaks I had never summited. From the beginning the Challenge was a thinly disguised excuse to allow me to dayhike the SPS list. A dayhike was initially defined as not being on the trail at midnight, but later more loosely defined as 24hrs or less.



Bob Burd on the summit of Apeture Pk during Sierra Challenge, August, 2007

In 2003 I first heard of Matthew online when I found that he had duplicated my long outing to Ventana Double Cone. Here was a guy 11 yrs my junior who liked a little suffering with his hikes, I thought. We met in the Spring of 2003 and did a few long hikes together, and then Matthew participated in 8/10 days of the Sierra Challenge that summer. It was a brief courtship before we became regular climbing partners. I talked with him about my vision of dayhiking any peak in CA, using the SPS to prove out the possibility, and he soon found himself swooped into the vortex. At the time of our meeting I had 82 SPS peaks to his small handful, and had considerably more experience. Having a family and career, I never really expected to be able to finish the SPS list, but I was happy to have someone to carry out this important mission and I encouraged him profusely.

Matthew met veteran Doug Mantle on Round Top in the Fall of 2002. At the time, Doug was working on setting the record for the most SPS peaks climbed in a year. Having done 88 at that time, Doug had hoped to do 100 before the year was out. Matthew decided to pursue this record in 2004 in a determined fashion. With no family and a flexible school/work schedule, Matthew was out every weekend the entire year. He pursued peaks in the Tahoe region in winter

by snowshoe, then moved to the Southern Sierra in early Spring. All of the summer and much of the Fall was spent in the High Sierra, relentlessly ticking off one peak after another. By the end of the year he had summited some 120 SPS peaks, 101 of which he had never summited before. I joined Matthew as often as I could, but by the end of the year he had already caught up to me in the total number of SPS peaks climbed. Having run out of SPS peaks to pursue when the first snows hit, Matthew turned to the DPS list and drove out to Death Valley and Mojave on the weekends to pursue more opportunities. A year later he would have me joining him in this pursuit as well.

Much effort was spent before a long hike in determining the optimal route. It was not always obvious from reading trip reports what the best way to dayhike a peak was. TOPO! software became indispensable to both of us in plotting courses for distance and elevation gain. Starting times were chosen to allow long trail approaches by headlamp and maximum daylight for cross-country portions. Over the years we have become very good at estimating the time a hike will take before we actually do it, but of course sometimes we are surprised and find conditions harder than we'd imagined.

2005 found Matthew pursuing deeper peaks to the more remote areas of the range. Perhaps the most impressive of the season was a 23hr solo outing to Finger and Tunemah Peaks, two of the hardest on the list. Suddenly it seemed that not only was it possible to

dayhike the whole list, but Matthew was going to be the one to do it. A few years earlier he was slower on both trail and cross-country than myself, but by now his pace on trail would easily outdistance me and I would have to wait for the cross-country talus and boulder fields to catch up. A few years later and I could no longer keep up with him even on the cross-country.



photo by Bob Burd

Ron Hudson climbing summit block on Two Eagle Peak during Sierra Challenge, August 2009 (L to R) David Alexander, Karl Fieberling, Adam Jantz

There were a few peaks that caused us some trepidation beforehand, and these we gave more preparation and treated more cautiously. In 2006, along with fellow climber Rick Kent, we made the first dayhike of Black Kaweah via an involved route out of Mineral King over first Glacier, then Hands and Knees Pass, down through little Lakes Valley and into the Big Arroyo. We would follow this route in subsequent years to reach Mt. Kaweah and then Red Kaweah, by which time we found we could reach the Big Arroyo in only five hours. One of the last of the “dangerous” peaks we tackled was Devils Crag. In 2007 Jeff Dhungana joined Matthew and I on this effort out of South Lake via Bishop Pass. 35mi, nearly 10,000ft of gain and some old school class 4 had us wary of

our chances. Excellent weather made our journey over Bishop Pass, down to the Middle Fork of the Kings River, and the hike up to Rambaud Pass enjoyable. A short rope was used on one section of the traverse above Rambaud Pass, but for the most part we found it a highly enjoyable scramble. The hike back out of LeConte Canyon was difficult but managed, and we were elated with our success after nearly 18hrs of effort.

Bob Burd (above) & Matthew Holliman (below) near crux on Devils Crags, August 2007



An early retirement gave me more time in the mountains and helped me make steady progress in catching up to Matthew in 2007 and 2008. By the end of the year I had only 21 peaks left to climb to Matthew's remaining five. I had whittled this to 16 by the time the 2009 Challenge started in August, but by then Matthew was down to a single remaining peak. Matthew's list finish was The Hermit, which he climbed with three others on the first day of the 2009 Challenge (Aug 7th), culminating six years of steadfast devotion to the quest.

Over those years we have gathered a band of like-minded climbers who have joined us on these long journeys in the Sierra and many other ranges as well. Matthew and I have enjoyed meeting up with a number of SC veterans including Ron Hudson, Doug Mantle, Tina Bowman, Patty Rambert, Elena Sherman, Scott Sullivan, Kathy Rich, and others. We'd like to thank the entire club for their guide books and informative trip reports without which this endeavor could not have been possible. Over nine years the Sierra Challenge has had more than 150 individuals participating, ranging from 16 to 64yrs in age. This mixing of the generations is one of the more cherished aspects of the Challenge. It has proved an excellent venue to introduce the SPS list to a new generation of climbers who are likely to keep the flame alive for years to come.

The most difficult SPS peak to dayhike is undoubtedly Picket Guard deep in the center of Sequoia NP. Matthew first attempted this mid-August of 2007 via Kaweah Gap and Pants Pass out of Crescent Meadow. Having crossed Pants Pass and making his way too slowly over rough terrain, Matthew turned around after 11hrs of effort fearing he'd never make the 24hr time limit. His successful second effort was via Whitney Portal over Trail Crest, a demanding 52 miles with 17,000ft of gain, thankfully mostly on trail. A slice of pizza every 1,000ft of the 5,000-foot climb back out of the Kern drainage helped get him back to Trail Crest and eventually Whitney Portal - in 23.5hrs.



L-R: Tom Becht, Matthew Holliman & Glenn Gookin celebrating on The Hermit, August 7th 2009; photo by Tom Becht

July 3-5th, 2009

SPS climb of Mts Lyell and Maclure

Kathy Rich and Ron Hudson, leaders

A group of 7 of us met at the parking lot near Tuolumne Lodge on Friday morning: Mary Jo Dungfelder, Gary Schenk, Keith Christensen, Matt Hengst, David Sha, and leaders Kathy Rich and Ron Hudson.

We started hiking at 9am and proceeded about 12 miles on the John Muir Trail up Lyell Fork to where it veers left at a lake below Donohue Pass. It was a beautiful morning and the meadows were

green and lush. There were a few wet areas by side streams in Lyell Canyon but no problems traversing them. One lake outlet necessitated our removing shoes and wading in the ice-cold water.

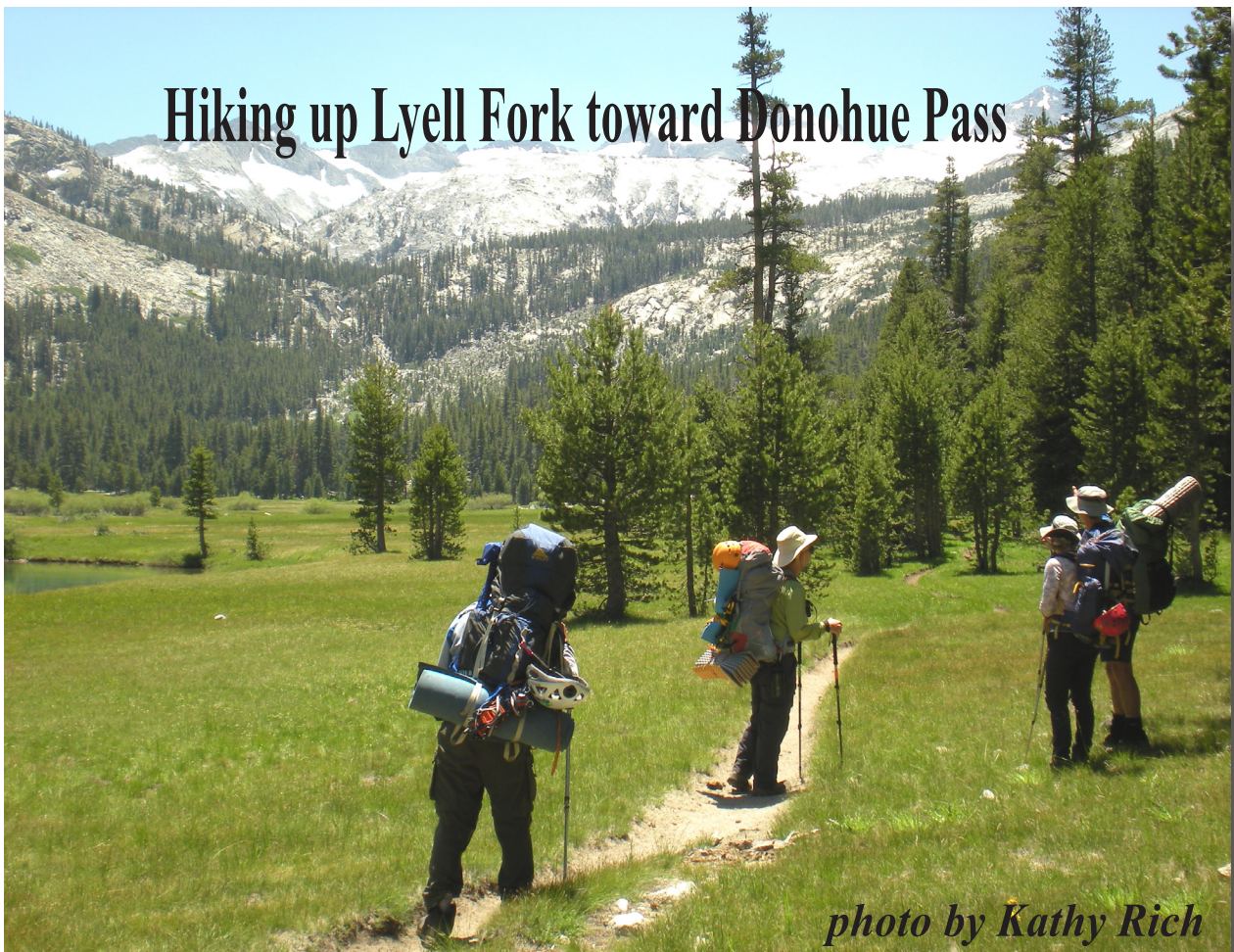


photo by Kathy Rich

We passed at least 50 PCT through-hikers whom had hiked 900 miles since the Mexico border. You could pick them out by the way they looked with light packs and lean bodies. Mary Jo and Gary were delighted to recognize a number of them that they had met while hiking the first 100 miles of the PCT after the kickoff in San Diego County in late April. We left the JMT at about 10,500' and proceeded south up the drainage to camp at 10,800', arriving at about 6pm. At 6am the next morning we left for a day of climbing adventure. We didn't know just which route we would do because snow conditions affect considerably the routes on the north side. But we were all prepared with helmet, ice axe,

crampons; and a rope, slings, and carabiners.

Our route was rock and meadows at first, then solid snow up to the Lyell-Maclure col. Much snow remained on the north sides; it had dumped in a storm about a month before. The snow conditions were good, no big suncups and an inch of softer snow on a harder surface. First on the agenda was Mt Lyell—an emblem peak. We angled toward steps in the snow of a steep, mostly snow route. However the steps were old, rounded and icy. The rock had an imposing cliff band part way up. Otherwise it mostly looked 3rd class. The safer route appeared to be the rock route that goes up the north side of the arete from the notch, and then through the cliffs. As we got closer to the rock, there appeared to be some zig-zagging ledges among the cliffs.

We got on the rock from the snow and shortly encountered a step 15-20 feet high, class 3-4 rock. Ron climbed it, found a good spot for an anchor and belay, and belayed each of the others up. Above that it was class 2 and 3 with some exposed sections. Kathy led much of that. One of the group left his largish pack at the bottom to facilitate climbing. There was an additional snow area where we used our ice axes, and more class 3 rock, but we all summited at 11AM. Instead of the rock, the snow where the old steps were east of the rock rib from the col appeared to be a more direct and safe way down if the snow had softened enough. There was a good runout. Ron went down the rock and checked



Kathy, Mary Jo, Matt

Careful traverse across snow slope

photo by Ron Hudson

out the snow by stepping on it. Sure enough, it was softer and appeared safe. He enlarged the steps in the firm snow, as did the others in turn. We mostly backed down the steep slope, protected by frequent secure ice axe placement.

Back at the col, we started up Maclure. We went up a few hundred feet of snow with our ice axes and then got onto the 3rd class rock. It was a matter of finding the best route among the blocks, steps, and ledges. A few ducks previously placed were useful in spots. Some exposed but easy third class shelves were encountered. All summited at about 3pm. Then we carefully came back down the class 3 rock. The rest of the way downhill was all on snow; we had fun glissading parts of it. Some sun-cups slowed things a bit, but we got back to camp at 5:30pm.



photo by Ron Hudson

We hiked back down Lyell Canyon to the cars the next morning. An enjoyable trip!
For more photos of the trip see: <http://s122.photobucket.com/albums/o251/rvisit/LyellMaclure/>



On summit of Mt Lyell – left to right - Mary Jo, Ron, Matt, Keith, Kathy, Dave, Gary

*Brett near top of the Leaning
Column pitch*

TRIP REPORT

16 May 2009

by Bill Oliver



Adventuring on Devils Tower

Sorry - the elevators aren't running today, and not tomorrow either!

In far NE Wyoming, Devils Tower, not counting various Native American legends, was first climbed in 1893 by, get this, local ranchers Ripley and Rogers as part of a big 4th of July celebration. . .

Vaguely similar to the aided first ascent of Half Dome in Yosemite in 1875, these enterprising and daring dudes fashioned a “ladder” by driving two-foot wooden stakes into one very long crack up a column. The ladder was last climbed in 1927, and only fragments high up can be seen today.

The prize for the pioneering free ascent of the tower fell to the legendary Fritz Wiessner in 1937, placing

a single piton. The following year Jack Durrance put up his adjacent route. Then Jack was unexpectedly summoned from New England by the park rangers in October 1941 – to rescue a renowned parachutist who had landed on top of the tower, but not his 1,000' rope! Durrance pulled it off, in spite of wet and icy conditions, after the lonesome dude had spent six days topside (with food drops). The most widely known landing, of course, occurred in 1977,

as documented in “Close Encounters of the Third Kind.” Lots of people seeing it were convinced that Hollywood had invented the improbable “Devils Tower” for the film. And then there are those few tourists who still ask if there’s any evidence remaining of the landing! Great history of DT here:

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/deto/first50.htm>

The Durrance is climbed far more than any other route not only because it’s among the lowest rated, but especially due to its inclusion in Roper and Steck’s “Fifty Classic Climbs of North America,” 1979. [Of the fifty, I had long ago climbed (and later led) the East Face of Mt Whitney. In 2006 my climbing partner Brett and I climbed the Upper Exum on the Grand Teton, though not the much longer Exum Direct.] Good Durrance Route beta here: <http://lamountaineers.org/NAC/browserf/climbs/devtdur/beta.htm>

Brett and I were primed to climb the classic Durrance Route on Devils Tower last summer. Then the raptors uncommonly, and unkindly, decided to nest on the south face, thus shutting it down for a couple of months. Then our Oct 10th date was cancelled the day before we would have departed home due to early snowfall. So, we eventually settled on mid-May of the new year.

From the get-go we planned to use a guide, a first for both of us. The Durrance is nominally one of the “easiest” of over 200 routes on the tower, but at 5.7 and with some long off-width cracks, neither of us felt competent to lead it. [Sure, \$205 each isn’t cheap but at least you don’t have to sweat what pro to carry or wonder if you’re still on route.] Most of our practice climbs last summer in Boulder Cyn, Eldorado Cyn and Lumpy Ridge in RMNP were face climbs, as it’s not so easy to find many low-level crack climbs in Colorado. [I had done a lot of crack climbing in Joshua Tree, about 15 years ago.]

It was touch-and-go as to whether the south face would actually open on its regular May 15th start date. Finally, the day before our departure the ranger called to say we were good-to-go, having so far spotted no falcon nesting activity there. Brett

and I drove up from Boulder, about 7.5 hours and 400 miles. It had been a somewhat rainy day at the tower, though clearing up when we arrived in late afternoon.

I called our guide, Andy Petefish [TowerGuides.com], and he stunned us with the news that two other guys needed to join us, as they had been rained out that day. Good grief – five on rope! Won’t that take forever, I’m thinking. And it certainly didn’t help matters when he added that they were from Arkansas – one of those flat states along the Mississippi. So be it. It did help when we later ran into the climbing ranger, who said that Andy was a great guide (he has guided for him some) and that he was allowed to have up to four clients on a rope.

We all converged at 0600 Saturday in the Visitor Center parking lot. Ben and Jason “acted normal” enough, and Brett and I tried to act normal/fearless too. But I was just relieved and grateful at not having to carry one of our two heavy ropes. [Hey, these three guys are all in about their mid-thirties, while I’m visiting my mid-sixties.] Andy has been guiding at DT way longer than anyone, and he has put up the only 5.13 route. He’s reasonably easy-going, as long as you don’t cross him. We would discover it’s reasonably easy to cross him! He always wanted us to “stay focused.” Hey, we know how to focus and banter at the same time – so get over it. It all worked out well, and Andy’s a very safe and competent guide.

Be sure to check out my photo gallery of our climb (includes some video):

http://gnarlybill.smugmug.com/gallery/8250941_WdaF8#543370387_kspXz

As planned, we would be first on the route, even as we waited about an hour below the first pitch so that our part of the world could warm up a bit. Fortunately for us, the Durrance route gets lots of sun. [Not so fortunate, though, if you’re climbing mid-summer with 100+ degrees] With temps later in the mid-to-high 60s, we had excellent weather with no storm tones.

We were a quick study for Andy: Ben was assigned to second him and clean the pro, followed by Brett, then me (the weakest), with Jason at sweep. A key timesaving technique would have Andy belaying two of us at once on separate ropes – one climber below the other. The first pitch, the Leaning Column, is 80' & 5.6. It was a good test piece for openers. The crux pitch follows – the Durrance Crack:

72' & 5.7. One stems between a narrow vertical crack on the left and an off-width crack on the right – eventually having to commit to the right to exit (or grow very long legs). [Off-width means the crack is too large for good hand/foot jams, but too small, say, for chimneying – in other words, it sucks big time.] One could well imagine that the tower, rising 1200' above the Belle Fourche River, is tottering on



Photos L-R: Pulling out the helmets now, & we'll all rope up together for the steep 3rd-4th class approach to the actual start of the climb; Jason eager to head on; Ben hanging loose; Brett's great shot of Bill with DT shadowed below him; Photo lower right same caption as upper left

collapse, like stacked dominoes, with the long narrow columns irregularly peeling off. Well, Devils Tower is actually pretty much unchanged through human history, and the secure hard rock is a climber's delight.

Man, I was having a great time – except for the hard pitches. I'm more used to rock climbing with my legs than my arms, and lately much more on face than crack. Jason at the bottom definitely helped out Brett and me in spotting good foot/hand

placements. As the route had just opened the day before with wet weather, we were likely the first team on the Durrance in quite awhile. Andy encouraged us to pull out the patches of new grass growing in the cracks, as stepping on them can definitely “un-stick” your shoes. Worse yet is stepping into a dark off-width crack and smearing your sole with pigeon crap.

The next three pitches [Cussin’ Crack: 30’ & 5.5; Flake Crack: 40’ & 5.5; and Chockstone Crack: 40’ & 5.4] were fairly short – thankfully, as my upper body strength was ebbing. A couple of times I came upon an old piton that called me by name. I had no qualms in using it for a handhold or in hitching it with a sling. Watching from his belay stance, at one point Andy shouted down, “If you’re going to cheat, you might as well use a biner.” I suppose I could have said something about his mother, but I simply took it as friendly advice and clipped in – besides, it’s generally not a good idea to mess with your belayer. Two or three times I came off and simply rested on suspension.

The 5th pitch (Chockstone Crack), having the lowest rating at 5.4, should have been the easiest, but by now it was my hardest as I struggled for traction and adequate holds ... until Andy unexpectedly provided serious “tension” and I made it past my crux. “YES!” The short 15’ Jump Traverse was definitely an awkward move, as one has to turn a sharp corner over big air. Surprisingly, it’s rated 5.6 even if you aid with a piton - and 5.8 if you don’t. That was a

no-brainer for me, but I trust Ben and Jason took the high road.

Noon and the first six pitches were now history – is that way cool or what! Although we still had plenty of fairly exposed ground to cover, we knew the rest of the climb would be a “walk in the park,” or more accurately a walk through “The Meadows” followed by two steep 4th class chutes. At last, we all maxed out (5112’) at about 12:45 pm. The top, about the size of a football field, seemed smaller than expected, and it was also quite rounded rather than flat. Grand views extended in all directions, and it’s easy to see why our lofty aerie has been described as an “island in the sky.”

For this most amazing day
I thank you, Lord.
For the leaping greenly spirits of trees
And a blue true dream of sky
And for everything
Which is natural
Which is infinite
Which is YES!
by E.E. Cummings



Ok, time to hang-out for about an hour and let the sun start warming our part of the world. Our campground is down there, almost surrounded by the meandering river

about 3:20 - and before long we were savoring killer brownies and frosty brews back near the cars.

It became evident early-on that Jason and Ben were great additions to our team, and they contributed so much to our overall enjoyment. Whether in the Ozarks of Arkansas or the Rockies of Colorado, we hope to combine more adventures together.

We departed our remote island after about a half-hour and soon began the first of four long rapps. Andy tied off an 85 m (280’) rope so that, except for the last guy, two could rapp at the same time – one on each side (140’). This technique too saved a lot of time. The anchor stances were a little tight for five, and one was very tight, but manageable. The walk-off point was reached

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Deadline for all submissions is three (3) weeks prior to the publication date.

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